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# Graduate Recital Program Notes

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### Recommended Citation

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# GRADUATE RECITAL PROGRAM NOTES

by

Emily Cline

B.M., Taylor University, 2009

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Masters of Music.

Department of Music  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
May 2011

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

GRADUATE RECITAL PROGRAM NOTES

By

Emily Cline

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Music

in the field of Vocal Performance.

Approved by:

Dr. Jeanine Wagner, Chair

Dr. Douglas Worthen

Dr. Diane Coloton

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
April 8, 2011

AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

EMILY CLINE, for the Master of Music degree in VOCAL PERFORMANCE,  
presented on \*April 8, 2011, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: GRADUATE RECITAL PROGRAM NOTES

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Jeanine Wagner

This document introduces Robert Schumann's *Liederkreis Heine*, Op. 24  
Nos. 1,4,5,6,and 9, *Marina's Aria* from *Boris Godunov* by Modest Musorgsky,  
*Siete Canciones Populares Españolas* by Manuel de Falla, *Airs Chantés* by  
Francis Poulenc, and *Songs from Letters* by Libby Larsen. Each of these works  
is presented with a brief history of composer as well as relevant historical context  
and information regarding the origins of the texts. A short analysis of both text  
and music completes each chapter.

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## CHAPTER 1

### ROBERT SCHUMANN: *LEIDERKREIS OP. 24*

#### *Nos. 1, 4, 5, 6 and 9*

Between the years 1840 and 1841 Robert Schumann composed over one hundred and thirty songs. Lieder was a new genre for Schumann, who had previously only published solo piano compositions. In 1839 he even related to a colleague his lack of esteem for vocal works compared to instrumental, that he had “never taken them for a great art form.”<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in 1840 he presented *Liederkreis Op. 24* as his premiere vocal publication. The poetry for the work was a complete set by Heinrich Heine from his *Buch der Lieder*.

1840 was a momentous year for Schumann, not only because of his great prolificacy, but also because of his long-awaited marriage to Clara Weick. For several years the couple had been at war with Clara’s father who refused to let them marry, citing Schumann’s poor income as a composer as one of the main objections. Unfortunately the struggle with Clara’s father seemed to stunt Schumann’s creative output.<sup>2</sup> After their marriage Schumann once again found the power to compose, this time with a fervor he attributed to Clara’s presence as his muse.

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<sup>1</sup> John Worthen, *Robert Schumann: Life and Death of a Musician* (London: Yale University Press, 2007) 186.

<sup>2</sup> Worthen, 170.

At first glance Heine's poetry does not seem a likely choice for a young man just married and composing for the pleasure of his new bride. The poetry is filled with sarcasm, bitterness, despair and a pervading sense of isolation. The poetry may not have represented Schumann's current state of mind, but he did connect deeply to Heine's words, setting this poet's text more than any other.<sup>3</sup> The songs also embody Schumann's commitment to provide Clara with a significant income and prove to her "that she was right to ally herself with him in marriage; she could trust to him and his genius."<sup>4</sup>

The German poet Heine was born in Dusseldorf in 1797. His poetry resonated with many people because of the political and social themes and a permeating sense of disillusionment.<sup>5</sup> Love in Heine's poetry is "never the shared, fulfilling and mutually enriching experience conveyed by Goethe, but it always results in an even deeper isolation."<sup>6</sup> Upon a brief meeting with Heine, one man described him as "in general an unpleasant, mysterious person, whose works are much more likeable than he is."<sup>7</sup>

Schumann's song cycle was conceived so that it would be divisible into two parts for publishing purposes. The fifth song of the cycle is climactic and intended to be a showpiece, with four songs leading up to it and four songs

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<sup>3</sup> Jon W. Finson, *Robert Schumann: The Book of Songs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) 52.

<sup>4</sup> Worthen, 187.

<sup>5</sup> Finson, 51.

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Spencer, *Heinrich Heine* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982) 1.

<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, *Robert Schumann, Words and Music: the Vocal Compositions* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1988) 50.

following.<sup>8</sup> It was there that the cycle could be split and published in two volumes, a measure Schumann hoped would not be necessary.

The opening song of Schumann's cycle, *Morgens steh' ich auf und frage* is a lightweight piece that features a walking accompanimental figuration and easy melody. An unexpected syncopation in the middle of the song highlights the text, "lieg' ich wach," or "I lie awake." The irony in this poem comes from the juxtaposition of opposites; morning and evening, getting up and sinking down, waking and dreaming. The song begins the poet's journey in a love-induced stupor, as "the music walks in its daytime sleep."<sup>9</sup>

<b>Morgens steh' ich auf und frage</b>	<b>Every morning I awake and ask</b>
--	--------------------------------------

Morgens steh' ich auf und frage: Kommt feins Liebchen heut? Abends sink' ich hin und klage: Aus blieb sie auch heut.	Every morning I awake and ask: Will my sweetheart come today? Every evening I sink down and lament: She stayed away again today.
--	--

In der Nacht mit meinem Kummer lieg' ich schlaflos, wach; träumend, wie im halben Schlummer, träumend wandle ich bei Tag.	All night with my grief I lie sleepless, waking; dreaming, as if half asleep, dreaming, I pass the day. <sup>10</sup>
---	---

*Lieb' Liebchen* features one of Heine's most striking and successful lyrics of irony.<sup>11</sup> Schumann sets it with a sparse accompaniment that mimics the thud of the carpenter's hammer and "hangs the speaker's preposterous self-pity out to

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<sup>8</sup> Finson, 54.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Sams, *The Songs of Robert Schumann* (London: Methuen, 1969) 37.

<sup>10</sup> Emily Ezust, trans., "Liederkreis," The Lied, Art Song, and Choral Texts Page, [www.recmusic.org/lieder/assemble\\_texts.html](http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/assemble_texts.html) [accessed April 1, 2011].

<sup>11</sup> Sams, 40.



dry.”<sup>12</sup> The measure of pause Schumann incorporates before the final phrase in each verse demonstrates his successful use of comedic timing that highlights the melodramatic moment.

**Lieb' Liebchen, leg's Händchen aufs...**

Lieb' Liebchen, leg's Händchen aufs  
Herze mein; -  
ach, hörst du, wie's pochet im  
Kämmerlein?  
da hauset ein Zimmermann  
schlimm und arg,  
der zimmert mir einen Totensarg.

Es hämmert und klopft bei Tag  
und bei Nacht;  
es hat mich schon längst um den  
Schlaf gebracht.  
Ach! sputet euch, Meister  
Zimmermann,  
damit ich balde schlafen kann.

**Dear sweetheart, lay your hand...**

Dear sweetheart, lay your hand on  
my heart; -  
ah, do you hear the hammering  
inside?  
inside there lives a carpenter,  
wicked and evil:  
he's building my coffin.

He hammers and pounds by day  
and by night;  
it has been a long time since I could  
sleep.  
Ah, hurry, Mister  
Carpenter,  
finish so that I can sleep.<sup>13</sup>

In the climactic song of the cycle, *Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden*, Schumann shows his true songwriting prowess.<sup>14</sup> Instead of creating a purely strophic setting as in many of his other songs, Schumann reconstructed the poem to craft a dramatic scene.<sup>15</sup> The change from the predominant melodic idea to the faster more agitated sections, almost recitative-like in comparison, gives the piano room to expand while the vocal melody is not as imperative. Schumann also replicates specific moments of the poem in the piano accompaniment; the

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<sup>12</sup> Finson, 56.

<sup>13</sup> Ezust.

<sup>14</sup> Sams, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Fischer-Dieskau, 49.

opening figure representing the rocking of the cradle, bass notes representing the grave.<sup>16</sup> Major and minor tonalities also play a key role in Schumann's interpretation of the text, as in "Hätt' ich dich doch nie gesehen," which is stated in E minor, followed by "schöne Herzenskönigin," shifting suddenly to D major. The final repeat of the opening verse gives Schumann excellent provender for a piano postlude.

### **Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden**

Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden,  
schönes Grabmal meiner Ruh',  
schöne Stadt, wir müssen scheiden,  
Lebe wohl! ruf' ich dir zu.

Lebe wohl, du heil'ge Schwelle,  
wo da wandelt Liebchen  
traut;  
lebe wohl! du heil'ge Stelle,  
wo ich sie zuerst geschaut.

Hätt' ich dich doch nie gesehen,  
schöne Herzenskönigin!  
Nimmer wär' es dann  
geschehen,  
daß ich jetzt so elend bin.

Nie wollt' ich dein Herze rühren,  
Liebe hab' ich nie erlebt;  
nur ein stilles Leben führen  
wollt' ich, wo dein Odem weht.

Doch du drängst mich selbst von  
hinnen,  
bitter Worte spricht dein Mund;  
Wahnsinn wühlt in meinen Sinnen,  
und mein Herz ist krank und wund.

Und die Glieder matt und  
träge  
schlepp' ich fort am

### **Pretty cradle of my sorrows**

Pretty cradle of my sorrows,  
pretty tombstone of my rest,  
pretty town - we must part, -  
farewell! I call to you.

Farewell, you holy threshold,  
across which my darling would  
tread;  
farewell! you sacred spot  
where I first saw her.

Would that I had never seen you,  
lovely queen of my heart!  
Never would it then have  
happened,  
that I would now be so wretched.

I never wished to touch your heart,  
I never begged for love;  
all I wished was to lead a quiet life  
where your breath could stir me.

Yet you yourself pushed me away  
from you,  
with bitter words at your lips;  
Madness filled my senses,  
and my heart is sick and wounded.

And my limbs are heavy and  
sluggish;  
I'll drag myself forward, leaning on

---

<sup>16</sup> Sams, 42.

Wanderstab,  
bis mein müdes Haupt ich lege  
ferne in ein kühles Grab.

my staff,  
until I can lay my weary head  
in a cool and distant grave.

*Warte, warte, wilder Schiffsmann* starts at a running pace with an upward figure in the bass. The vocal line comes in sooner than expected, reinforcing the sense of urgency. The poetry quickly becomes hyper-dramatic but Schumann continues to set the poem earnestly, seemingly un-attuned to the ironic overtones.<sup>17</sup> Schumann's addition of "oh" to the end of the second stanza of the poem introduces an element of despair by "cutting off the voice on the seventh of the dominant chord."<sup>18</sup> Instead of repeating the opening of the song, Schumann begins the third stanza with more suitable material from the middle of the first verse. The final stanza corresponds to the end of the second, transposed higher by thirds until the climax is diffused with another postlude.

**Warte, warte, wilder Schiffsmann**

Warte, warte, wilder Schiffsmann,  
gleich folg' ich zum Hafen dir;  
von zwei Jungfraun nehm' ich  
Abschied,  
von Europa und von ihr.

Blutquell, rinn' aus meinen Augen,  
Blutquell, brich aus meinem  
Leib,  
daß ich mit dem heißen Blute  
meine Schmerzen niederschreib'.

Ei, mein Lieb, warum just heute  
schauderst du, mein Blut zu sehn?  
Sahst mich bleich und  
Herzeblutend

**Wait, wait, wild boatman**

Wait, wait, wild boatman,  
soon I'll follow you to the harbor;  
from two maidens I am taking my  
leave,  
from Europe and from Her.

Stream of blood, run from my eyes,  
stream of blood, burst from my  
body,  
so that with this hot blood  
I can write down my agonies.

Ah, my dear, why just today  
do you shudder to see my blood?  
You've seen me pale, my heart  
bleeding,

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<sup>17</sup> Sams, 44.

<sup>18</sup> Fischer-Dieskau, 49.

lange Jahre vor dir  
stehn!

standing before you for many  
years!

Kennst du noch das alte Liedchen  
von der Schlang' im Paradies,  
die durch schlimme Apfelgabe  
unsern Ahn ins Elend stieß.

Do you know that old song  
about the serpent in Paradise  
who, by wickedly giving an apple,  
threw our ancestors into misery?

Alles Unheil brachten Äpfel!  
Eva bracht' damit den Tod,  
Eris brachte Trojas Flammen,  
du brachst'st beides, Flamm' und  
Tod.

Apples have caused every ill!  
Eve brought death through them,  
Eris caused the flames of Troy;  
and you brought both, flame and  
death.<sup>19</sup>

*Mit Myrthen und Rosen* finishes the cycle with a sentimental love song “unrelieved by irony.”<sup>20</sup> The infectious triplet figure winds through voice and piano alike; the two parts are more closely related than in previous songs. The piano often doubles the voice, and not only at cadence points, but in the midst of phrases. The text reflects the poet in the same state as at the beginning of the work, waiting for the loved one “as in a waking dream.”<sup>21</sup> The piano is not given a showy postlude; only a few modest measures end the cycle.

### **Mit Myrten und Rosen**

### **With myrtle and roses**

Mit Myrten und Rosen, lieblich und  
hold,  
mit duft'gen Zypressen und  
Flittergold,  
möcht' ich zieren dieß Buch wie  
'nen Totenschrein,  
Und sargen meine Lieder hinein.

With myrtle and roses, lovely and  
pretty,  
with fragrant cypresses and gold  
tinsel,  
I would decorate this book like a  
coffin  
and bury my songs inside it.

O könnt' ich die Liebe sargen hinzu!  
Auf dem Grabe der Liebe wächst  
Blümlein der Ruh',

O if only I could bury my love there  
as well!  
On the grave of Love grows the

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<sup>19</sup> Ezust.

<sup>20</sup> Sams, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

da blüht es hervor, da pflückt man  
es ab, -  
doch mir blüht's nur, wenn ich  
selber im Grab.

Hier sind nun die Lieder, die einst  
so wild,  
wie ein Lavastrom, der dem Ätna  
entquillt,  
Hervorgestürzt aus dem tiefsten  
Gemüt,  
und rings viel blitzende Funken  
versprüht!

Nun liegen sie stumm und  
totengleich,  
nun starren sie kalt und nebelbleich,  
doch aufs neu die alte Glut sie  
belebt,  
wenn der Liebe Geist einst über sie  
schwebt.

Und es wird mir im Herzen viel  
Ahnung laut:  
der Liebe Geist einst über  
sie taut;  
einst kommt dies Buch in deine  
Hand,  
du süßes Lieb im fernen  
Land.

Dann löst sich des Liedes  
Zauberbann,  
die bloßen Buchstaben schaun dich  
an,  
sie schauen dir flehend ins schöne  
Aug',  
und flüstern mit Wehmut und  
Liebeshauch.

blossom of peace;  
it blooms and then is plucked, -  
yet it will bloom for me only when I  
am myself in the grave.

Here now are the songs which,  
once so wild,  
like a stream of lava that flowed  
from Etna,  
burst from the depths of  
my heart,  
and spray glittering sparks  
everywhere!

Now they lie mute and  
death-like,  
now they stare coldly, pale as mist,  
but the old glow will revive them  
afresh,  
when the spirit of love someday  
floats above them.

And in my heart the thought grows  
loud:  
the spirit of love will someday thaw  
them;  
someday this book will arrive in  
your hands,  
you, my sweet love in a distant  
land.

Then shall the songs' magic spell  
be broken,  
and the white letters shall gaze at  
you;  
they'll gaze beseechingly into your  
lovely eyes,  
and whisper with sadness and a  
breath of love.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ezust.

CHAPTER 2

MODEST MUSORGSKY: *MARINA'S ARIA FROM BORIS*  
*GODUNOV*

In an 1876 letter to his close friend Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Modest Musorgsky writes “Your task, friend, to communicate the Russian song to the Russian people and to *others*, is a great consolation to me. This beloved thing might be lost, *might be lost completely*.”<sup>23</sup> Musorgsky’s love for his country and his people motivated much of his writing. His opera *Boris Godunov* was born not only from a passion for Russian history, but also to attempt “musically realized Russian speech.” Although Tchaikovsky, after seeing the first draft of the opera, thought that Musorgsky should attempt a symphony instead, *Boris Godunov* eventually became the great Russian opera that Musorgsky envisioned.<sup>24</sup>

Musorgsky was born in Karevo in 1839. He began to improvise compositions on the piano as a boy, inspired by Russian folk tales told to him by his nurse.<sup>25</sup> His mother gave him his first formal lessons, and he when he attended school in St. Petersburg he continued his piano studies. At thirteen Musorgsky enrolled as a cadet for the Imperial Guard, but he resigned his commission at nineteen after beginning composition lessons with Mily Balakirev, intent on pursuing a career as a composer. Two years later he made his

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<sup>23</sup> Jay Leyda and Sergei Bertensson, eds., *The Musorgsky Reader: A Life of Modeste petrovich Musorgsky in Letters and Documents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1947) 332.

<sup>24</sup> Caryl Emerson and Robert William Oldani, *Modest Musorgsky and Boris Godunov: Myths, Realities, Reconsiderations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 278.

<sup>25</sup> David Brown, *Musorgsky: His Life and Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 3.

compositional debut in a symphony concert of the newly founded Russian Music Society.<sup>26</sup>

Musorgsky began working on *Boris Godunov* soon after the premiere of Pushkin's play. The play had been completed in 1825, but did not pass censorship until 1866.<sup>27</sup> Musorgsky created a libretto loosely based on the play, but with a greater concentration on character development and more scenes with the title character. In 1869 he presented his creation to the Imperial theatre board, but it was rejected, in part because Musorgsky had not included a leading female role, and also because of the "extraordinary modernism of the music."<sup>28</sup> Musorgsky revised his opera over the next few years, adding the role of Marina and removing some of the unfavorable political overtones.

In 1873 Musorgsky re-submitted *Boris* to the board, this time with success. The work premiered in February 1874, with costumes and scenery reused from the staging of Pushkin's play in 1870.<sup>29</sup> Instead of referring to *Boris* as an opera, Musorgsky called it a "Musical representation in four parts and seven scenes."<sup>30</sup> An unimpressed newspaper critic claimed that it was "cacophony in four acts and seven scenes."<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the public gave Musorgsky an enthusiastic

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<sup>26</sup> M.D. Calvocoressi, *Mussorgsky* (London: Dent, 1974) 12.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, 118.

<sup>28</sup> Donald Brook, *Six Great Russian Composers: Glinka, Borodin, Mussorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Scriabin; Their Lives and Works* (London: Salisbury Square, 1947) 54.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, 130.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

reception; at one point he was reported to have taken “eighteen to twenty curtain calls.”<sup>32</sup>

*Boris Godunov* is based on an actual character from Russian history as chronicled by Nikolay Karamzin in the 1820’s. Godunov was Chancellor to the famous Tsar Ivan “the Terrible.” After Ivan’s death, Godunov assumed the regency in place of Ivan’s two sons, the eldest feeble-minded and the younger, Dmitri, still an infant. Upon Dmitri’s murder, Godunov took the throne despite suspicion that he perpetrated the crime. The plot of *Boris Godunov* centers on Grigori, who pretends to be Dmitri escaped from assassination, who now intends to make his claim on the throne of Russia.<sup>33</sup>

*Marina’s Aria* occurs in the third act of the opera, commonly referred to as the “Polish act.” Marina, daughter of a Polish governor, wishes to marry Grigori in hopes that she will one day rule Russia through him. After her maids sing to entertain her, she dismisses them and sings of her boredom and thirst for power.

Musorgsky introduces E major in this act, a key that he did not like, to represent “the Poles, Polish scheming, and the resulting Polish control of the pretender.”<sup>34</sup> The aria is based on the Polish Mazurka, a dance in three with an accented second beat. *Marina’s Aria* opens in E minor, “life is dreary,” but changes to E major when Marina begins her plotting. The melody increases in chromaticism when Marina speaks of seducing Dmitri, but the dance becomes a forceful march as she pictures herself on the throne of Moscow.

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<sup>32</sup> Brown, 131

<sup>33</sup> Brooks, 59.

<sup>34</sup> Emerson, 264.



### **Marina's Aria**

Ah, poor Marina! Ah, how dull is life!  
Life is empty, life is dreary,  
Long the days and weary,  
Cheerless gray and flat.  
Sing heigh-ho!  
All the host of men who woo me,  
Knights and wealthy magnates,  
Cannot make existence brighter!

Yet, at last, the dawn is breaking,  
In the East a rose is blushing;  
There's a youth late come from Moscow  
Who has set my heart a-beating.

My Dmitri, sent by Heaven,  
Pitiless avenger,  
God's redresser, called and chosen,  
Thou shalt wreak a timely vengeance on Boris,  
The black usurper  
Who to slake his thirst for power  
Slew the innocent Tsarevich.

I will rouse our sleepy magnates,  
Bid them fight;  
With the gleam of gold I'll win them  
For thy cause.

As for thee, my young pretender,  
Thou my bashful wooer,  
Thou shalt be entranced by passion,  
Mad with love.

I will stifle all the scruples  
With my ardent kisses,  
My Tsarevich, my Dmitri,  
Long expected lover.

I will charm their ears with love words  
Passionate and tender,  
My Tsarevich, my Dmitri,  
I will teach thee courage!

For Marina long has wearied,  
Sought by lovers shy and tepid,  
Youths who only dream of passion,

Worthy magnates vain and pompous.

But Marina longs for glory,  
But Marina craves for power!

On the royal throne of Moscow  
I would queen it proudly,  
Robed in purple, decked with jewels,  
Glittering like the sunlight,  
While, astounded at my beauty,  
All the silly folk of Moscow,  
All the herd of boastful nobles  
At my feet would fall and grovel.

In the legends and the folksongs  
Would my splendor be recorded,  
At the glory of Marina men shall Marvel!

Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kurt Adler, ed., *Operatic Anthology: Celebrated Arias Selected from Operas by Old and Modern Composers* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1954) 2:18.

## CHAPTER 3

### MANUEL DE FALLA: *SIETE CANCIONES POPULARES ESPAÑOLAS*

It may be said that nationalistic composers are traveling a one-way street that ends in a cul-de-sac; that once they reach a certain point there is no direction for them to go. Perhaps this is because the distinct sounds of a nation's folk treasury are quickly used up, or simply because there is little room for stylistic evolution. Such could have been the case for Spanish composer Manuel de Falla, born in Cadiz in 1876. Falla lived in a time when the *zarzuela* was dominating the Spanish musical scene, to the immense fame and success of its composers.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the temptation was great, but in his mature style beginning with *Siete Canciones populares Españolas* Falla managed to incorporate a Spanish folk idiom with his modern aesthetic to create something that would secure not only his place in the canon of musical history but Spain's as well.

Manuel de Falla learned music from his mother, an amateur pianist, as a boy. He studied with a handful of different teachers, even travelling from Cadiz to Madrid to take lessons with famous Conservatoire piano teacher José Tragó. When the family moved to Madrid Falla still traveled to Cadiz to consult with his earlier teacher Enrique Broca, a composer with a modest reputation.<sup>37</sup> In Madrid Falla also studied composition with Felipe Pedrell at the *Real Conservatorio de Música y Declamación*.

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<sup>36</sup> Jaime Pahissa, *Manuel de Falla: His Life and Work* (London: Museum Press, 1954) 27.

<sup>37</sup> Pahissa, 24.

During his childhood Falla demonstrated an ability to absorb himself in his efforts with unswerving attention. He created a fantasy city for himself which was so minutely detailed and in which he was so absorbed that his parents sent him to see a doctor to diagnose mental illness.<sup>38</sup> These childhood tendencies were manifested in adulthood in a great fastidiousness and self-criticism that significantly affected the composer's output. One of the least prolific composers of his age, Falla was not content to present to the public something that was not absolutely perfected. His desire for flawlessness subsequently insured that Falla was one of the most consistent composers of his time.<sup>39</sup>

In 1907 Falla moved to Paris, a city thriving with composers from all around the world. During his seven-year visit he befriended many leading composers including Dukas, Albéniz, Debussy, Fauré and Ravel. In 1912 Falla was commissioned to harmonize a Greek folksong; he completed the harmonization with some of his own ideas and harmonic system and was inspired to employ the same methods on some of the folksongs from his homeland.<sup>40</sup>

In the following year Falla composed all seven of his *Siete Canciones populares Españolas*. As soon as they were completed a Spanish singer wanted to premier them in Paris in a program of other Spanish works. Falla refused, largely because presenting his own work as "Spanish" had previously backfired

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<sup>38</sup> Pahissa, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Burnett James, *Manuel de Falla and the Spanish musical renaissance* (London: Gollancz, 1979) 62.

<sup>40</sup> Suzanne Demarquez, *Manuel de Falla* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Co., 1968) 68.

when offered to the public.<sup>41</sup> As it were, the work was not premiered until the spring of 1915. Falla as well as other Spanish composers had been forced to leave Paris and return home at the start of the First World War, so the 1915 concert was presented as something of a “welcome home.”<sup>42</sup> *Siete Canciones populares Españolas* was sung by Luisa Vela with Falla at the piano at the *Ateneo* in Madrid.

Although many of the *Siete Canciones* are melodically identical to their folksong counterparts, Falla imbued them with his own aesthetic based on the idea of natural resonance which he learned about from a treatise by Louis Lucas entitled *L'Acoustique Nouvelle*. The book, written in the mid-nineteenth century, predicted the course of modern harmony.<sup>43</sup> Natural resonance fascinated Falla, and it eventually became the harmonic foundation of his mature style. The concept is based on the natural harmonic overtone series. In practice it means that the overtones of the fundamental are essential notes in the harmony, and in turn become fundamentals themselves.<sup>44</sup> This idea opened up an entire new world of harmonic possibilities for Falla's compositions.

*El Paño Moruno*, the first of the *Siete Canciones*, sets the tone for the work with a long, dance-like piano introduction. The piano is as much a solo instrument as the voice in this work, and adds a layer of excitement and anticipation that would not exist if Falla had simply given the well-known melody

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<sup>41</sup> Pahissa, 76.

<sup>42</sup> James, 79.

<sup>43</sup> Pahissa, 29.

<sup>44</sup> James, 77.

a standard harmonization.<sup>45</sup> The text, a lyrical quatrain, reflects the Spanish style called *arte menor* or *quebrado* which is used in nearly all of the seven songs, and is comprised of two lines with eight syllables each.<sup>46</sup> The text also contains an example of what the Spanish call “the sting in the tail,” referring to the last two lines of the verse, which “carry the most impact and are thus composed first.”<sup>47</sup> The poem conveys the bitterness of a women who has lost her innocence and along with it her social standing, a morality warning for other young women.

#### **El Paño Moruno**

Al paño fino, en la tienda,  
una mancha le cayó;  
Por menos precio se vende,  
Porque perdió su valor.  
¡Ay!

#### **The moorish cloth**

On the fine cloth in the store  
a stain has fallen;  
It sells at a lesser price,  
because it has lost its value.  
Alas!<sup>48</sup>

The second song, *Seguidilla Murciana*, is a fiery piece with poetic roots in the Hispanic tradition of improvised oral poetry. Such poetry, simultaneously composed and performed, was often used in a sort of verbal dueling in which two parties hurl insults at each other in poetic form.<sup>49</sup> The text clearly suggests such a duel, with cleverly worded accusations of hypocrisy and inconstancy. The title

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<sup>45</sup> James, 76.

<sup>46</sup> Demarquez, 69.

<sup>47</sup> Armistead, 125.

<sup>48</sup> Claudia Landivar Cody, trans., “Siete Canciones Populares Españolas,” The Lied, Art Song, and Choral Texts Page, [www.recmusic.org/lieder/get\\_text.html](http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/get_text.html) [accessed April 1, 2011].

<sup>49</sup> Armistead, 29.

*Seguidilla* comes from the poetic form that alternates between five and seven syllable lines.<sup>50</sup>

### **Seguidilla Murciana**

Cualquiera que el tejado  
Tenga de vidrio,  
No debe tirar piedras  
Al del vecino.  
Arrieros semos;  
¡Puede que en el camino  
Nos encontremos!

Por tu mucha inconstancia  
Yo te comparo  
Con peseta que corre  
De mano en mano;  
Que al fin se borra,  
Y créyendola falsa  
¡Nadie la toma!

### **Seguidilla Murciana**

Who has a roof  
of glass  
should not throw stones  
to their neighbor's (roof).  
Let us be muleteers;  
It could be that on the road  
we will meet!

For your great inconstancy  
I compare you  
to a [coin] that runs  
from hand to hand;  
which finally blurs,  
and, believing it false,  
no one accepts!<sup>51</sup>

*Asturiana* quotes the popular melody, but with an accompaniment that adds interest and atmosphere to the simple song.<sup>52</sup> As contained and quiet as the previous songs are passionate and colorful, *Asturiana* evokes a sense of numbness caused by intense sorrow. The melody floats over an accompaniment that mimics the steady drip of rain. At the high point in each phrase the piano creates a distinct dissonance with the voice, alternating between a minor second and a tritone. The accompaniment seems to resolve from a minor to major tonality at the end, but at the last moment becomes even more dissonant, reflecting grief turning suddenly to hope and then, just as quickly, to despair.

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<sup>50</sup> Armistead, 50.

<sup>51</sup> Cody.

<sup>52</sup> Pahissa, 77.

### **Asturiana**

Por ver si me consolaba,  
Arrime a un pino verde,  
Por ver si me consolaba.

Por verme llorar, lloraba.  
Y el pino como era verde,  
Por verme llorar, lloraba.

### **Asturian**

To see whether it would console me,  
I drew near a green pine,  
To see whether it would console me.

Seeing me weep, it wept;  
And the pine, being green,  
seeing me weep, wept.<sup>53</sup>

Falla's *Jota*, the fourth song of the cycle, is composed of entirely original music. Traditionally, the jota is a dance from Aragon invented by an Arab musician who was exiled to Calatayud.<sup>54</sup> The dance is in 3/8 time, and once again Falla uses the opportunity to compose an extended piano introduction. The poetry is a perfect example of popular Spanish lyrical poetry, and is set in a declamatory style between dance sections.<sup>55</sup>

### **Jota**

Dicen que no nos queremos  
Porque no nos ven hablar;  
A tu corazón y al mio  
Se lo pueden preguntar.

Ya me despido de tí,  
De tu casa y tu ventana,  
Y aunque no quiera tu madre,  
Adiós, niña, hasta mañana.  
Aunque no quiera tu madre...

### **Jota**

They say we don't love each other  
because they never see us talking  
But they only have to ask  
both your heart and mine.

Now I bid you farewell  
your house and your window too  
and even ... your mother  
Farewell, my sweetheart  
until tomorrow.<sup>56</sup>

The *Nana*, or lullaby, has many versions in Spain varying by region. The version that Falla chose to set, not surprisingly, is the one that his mother sang to

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<sup>53</sup> Cody.

<sup>54</sup> Demarquez, 39.

<sup>55</sup> Armistead, 51.

<sup>56</sup> Cody.



him, reflecting the earliest of his musical memories.<sup>57</sup> The Andalusian *Nana* has Eastern influence, which Falla thought was most likely from India, manifested primarily in the melismatic ornamentation.<sup>58</sup> A steady piano accompaniment creates the rocking of the cradle as the vocal line moves almost independently from it, without rhythmic motivation; an unhurried soothing that will continue until the child falls asleep and perhaps a little while longer.

#### **Nana**

Duérmete, niño, duerme,  
Duerme, mi alma,  
Duérmete, lucerito  
De la mañana.  
Naninta, nana,  
Naninta, nana.  
Duérmete, lucerito  
De la mañana.

#### **Nana**

Go to sleep, Child, sleep,  
Sleep, my soul,  
Go to sleep, little star  
Of the morning.  
Lulla-lullaby,  
Lulla-lullaby,  
Sleep, little star  
of the morning.<sup>59</sup>

*Canción*, like the *Nana*, does not have an extended piano part. It alone of the cycle places the piano in a traditional collaborative role with neither independence nor virtuosity. The interest from this song comes heavily from the unusual cadences at the ends of the verses, as well as the humorously love-sick text which ends each stanza with a whiney “*madre*.”

#### **Canción**

Por traidores, tus ojos,  
voy a enterrarlos;  
No sabes lo que cuesta,  
»Del aire«  
Niña, el mirarlos.

#### **Song**

Because your eyes are traitors  
I will hide from them  
You don't know how painful  
it is to look at them  
in the air.

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<sup>57</sup> Pahissa, 78.

<sup>58</sup> Demarquez, 40.

<sup>59</sup> Cody.

»Madre a la orilla  
Madre«

Dicen que no me quieres,  
Y a me has querido...  
Váyase lo ganado,  
»Del aire«  
Por lo perdido,  
»Madre a la orilla  
Madre«

"Mother I feel worthless,  
Mother"

They say they don't love me  
and yet once  
they did love me  
"Love has been lost  
in the air  
Mother all is lost  
It is lost Mother"<sup>60</sup>

The final song of the cycle, *Polo*, is almost entirely of Falla's own invention. Falla cannot resist once again giving the piano prominence. He departs from his usual pattern of text setting in this piece, giving the poetry more time with the breaking-up and repetition of lines. Just as the previous text exposed the humorous side of love-sick despair, *Polo* evokes the true emotions of being wronged in love. Falla's departure from a purely strophic representation of the poetry allows for a less contrived, more human interpretation of the verse. Once again Andalusian melisma is a prominent feature, this time recalling Flamenco dance, which comes from that same region.

### **Polo**

¡Guardo una pena en mi pecho,  
Que a nadie se la diré!

Malhaya el amor, malhaya,  
¡Y quien me lo dió a entender!

¡Ay!

### **Polo**

I keep a sorrow in my breast  
that to no one will I tell.

Wretched be love, wretched,  
And he who gave me to understand  
it!  
Ay!<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Cody.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### FRANCIS POULENC: *AIRS CHANTÉS*

Seldom do composers actively disparage the words which they set to music, but when Francis Poulenc composed *Airs Chantés* he went out of his way to make his contempt towards the poetry of Jean Moréas known. The set, composed of four of Moréas' sonnets, was first premiered in 1928 by Soprano Suzanne Peignot with Poulenc himself at the piano in a concert which featured the music of both Poulenc and his contemporary Georges Auric. Although Poulenc himself considered them unremarkable, the songs demonstrate a melodic ease that greatly surpasses the inferiority of the poetry.

Francis Poulenc, born in Paris in 1899, was not trained formally in composition as were most of his contemporaries. He learned to play the piano from his mother as a boy and excelled at the instrument. Upon the completion of his education at public school he tried to gain admittance to the Paris Conservatoire. He submitted a handful of his compositions but was rejected and had to seek his training elsewhere, first with Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes and later with Charles Koechlin.<sup>62</sup> Despite his lack of education, he quickly made a name for himself in the musical world as part of *Les Six*, a group which also included Darius Milhaud, Germaine Tailleferre, Georges Auric, Louis Durey, and Arthur Honegger.

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<sup>62</sup> Keith W. Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982) 9.

In 1927 Poulenc first began composing *Air Vif*, the final song of *Airs Chantés*. He chose four of Moréas' sonnets to set to music as a challenge to himself and also to tease his friend François Hepp, who admired the poet.<sup>63</sup> Poulenc joked that the poetry was "suitable for mutilation," but the challenge he set for himself may have been more serious than he let on as he struggled with setting classical poetry to music after his success with *Chansons galliades* in 1926.<sup>64</sup> In May 1928 Poulenc finally completed the song cycle after a positive response to the premiere of *Air vif* and *Air romantique* the previous March.<sup>65</sup>

In 1956 poet Raymond Queneau published an article entitled "Pour une bibliothèque idéale," which he compiled after sending out a survey among well-known French personalities to respond with a list of the top hundred books they would love to own. Poulenc was the only musician to participate, and in addition to his list of books he would love to own, he also included a shorter list of books he would hate to own. The author at the very top of this second list is none other than Jean Moréas, and in the space for the title of the book it simply reads "tout."<sup>66</sup>

Despite Poulenc's harsh criticism of Moréas, the poet's popularity in France at the time was undiminished. Jean Moréas was born Ioannis Papadiamantopoulos in 1856 to a wealthy aristocratic family in Athens, Greece.

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<sup>63</sup> Carl B. Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc*. Lives in Music No. 3 (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2001) 162.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel, 257.

<sup>65</sup> Schmidt, 163.

<sup>66</sup> Sydney Buckland and Myriam Chimenes, *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art, and Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999) 144.

Uninterested in the family business, Papadiamantopoulos settled in Paris in the 1870's after completing a brief tour of Europe. He was eventually naturalized and only returned to his home in Athens twice in his life.<sup>67</sup> In Paris Papadiamantopoulos adopted the pseudonym Jean Moréas, and quickly became known as an eccentric and exotic character whose charisma won him followers among both amateur and established literary circles.<sup>68</sup>

Moréas' early poetry was steeped in symbolism following the school founded by Baudelaire. After some time he broke away and attempted to found his own school, the *École Romane*, which enjoyed brief success but was ultimately criticized for its "obvious archaisms" and "a somewhat obscure and artificial grace."<sup>69</sup> The third and final development in Moréas' poetry came with his greatest work *Les Stances*, which are "so replete with allusions, appeals to or symbols in nature that it might well be called a volume of nature poems."<sup>70</sup> In this book of poems, a combination of his classical aesthetic and the more popular symbolist movement, Moréas finally produced a work that critics were ready to praise.

The first song of the set, *Air romantique*, Poulenc says is to be sung "with the wind in one's face."<sup>71</sup> The fast tempo and continuous sixteenth-note figuration

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<sup>67</sup> John Davis Butler, *Jean Moréas: A Critique of His Poetry and Philosophy* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967) 21.

<sup>68</sup> Butler, 27.

<sup>69</sup> Ludwig Lewisohn, *The Poets of Modern France* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1918) 46.

<sup>70</sup> Butler, 190.

<sup>71</sup> Francis Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs = Journal de mes Mélodies* (London: V. Gollancz, 1985) 25.

help paint the picture of one walking outside in a storm, wind howling and thunder rumbling in the distance. The sudden change of mood in the middle section represents calm in both the storm and the poet's mind before the fury is again unleashed. This connection between nature and the internal dialogue of the poet is key in much of Moréas' poetry, and Poulenc uses the connection to create a charged atmosphere to begin his song cycle.

### **Air romantique**

J'allais dans la campagne avec le  
vent d'orage,  
Sous le pâle matin, sous les nuages  
bas;  
Un corbeau ténébreux escortait mon  
voyage,  
Et dans les flaques d'eau  
retentissaient mes pas.

La foudre à l'horizon faisait courir sa  
flamme  
Et l'Aquilon doublait ses longs  
gémissements;  
Mais la tempête était trop faible pour  
mon âme,  
Qui couvrait le tonnerre avec ses  
battements.

De la dépouille d'or du frêne et de  
l'érable  
L'Automne composait son éclatant  
butin,  
Et le corbeau toujours, d'un vol  
inexorable,  
M'accompagnait sans rien changer  
à mon destin.

### **Romantic song**

I walked the countryside under the  
oncoming storm,  
In the pale morning light, under low  
hanging clouds;  
A sinister raven was my only  
company,  
And my feet splashed through the  
puddles of water.

At the horizon the lightning arrowed  
its fire downward  
And the north wind doubled his  
drawn-out groaning;  
But the storm was too weak for my  
soul,  
Who drowns out the thunder with its  
beats.

The golden glowing foliage of the  
ash and the acorn  
Is relished prey to the  
autumn,  
And still the raven, with unrelenting  
persistence  
Keeps me company without  
changing my destiny.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Linda Godry, trans., "Airs Chantés," The Lied, Art Song, and Choral Texts Page, [www.recmusic.org/lieder/assemble\\_texts.html](http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/assemble_texts.html) [accessed April 1, 2011].

*Air Champêtre* is an effervescent song with a bouncy, carefree accompaniment and a fast tempo. The lyrical melody, purely diatonic in nature, gains interest from the interesting modulations in the middle section. The compositional choice to “cheat” on the text setting at “sous la mou, sous la mousse à moitié” became a thorn in Poulenc’s side. In his *Journal de mes Mélodies* he writes, “Have I been punished for my vandalism? I fear so, because this song that irritates me is said to be ‘a hit.’”<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, as Bernac points out, “the words are quite unimportant; the virtue of the song lies in the opportunity it gives for a beautiful display of vocal and musical qualities.”<sup>74</sup> Oddly enough this poem had special significance to Moréas, who suffered greatly from the loss of respect and friendship of his colleagues at his defection from Symbolism.<sup>75</sup>

#### **Air Champêtre**

Belle source, belle source,  
Je veux me rappeler sans cesse,  
Qu'un jour, guidé par l'amitié  
Ravi, j'ai contemplé ton visage, ô  
déesse,  
Perdu sous la mou, sous la mousse  
à moitié.

Que n'est-il demeuré, cet ami que je  
pleure,  
O nymphe, à ton culte attaché,  
Pour se mêler encore au souffle qui  
t'effleure,  
Et répondre à ton flot caché?

#### **Country song**

Beautiful spring, beautiful spring,  
I will never forget how I,  
led by friendship,  
Was enthralled by your face, oh  
goddess,  
Lost in sultriness, half hidden under  
moss.

Where is he now, the friend I  
mourn,  
Oh nymph, attached to your cult,  
I join the breeze that  
caresses you,  
And answer your secret brook?<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Poulenc, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Pierre Bernac, *The Interpretation of French Song* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978) 274.

<sup>75</sup> Butler, 139.

<sup>76</sup> Godry.

Sharply contrasting to the other three songs of the cycle in tempo and overall mood, *Air grave* is at once predictable and poignant. The stunning vocal line gives credence to Poulenc's reputation as "the last of the lyrical composers,"<sup>77</sup> although it fails to satisfy Poulenc's desire for originality.<sup>78</sup> As in *Air Champêtre*, the unusual melody in the middle section highlights the modern aesthetic while preserving the "almost forgotten art of modulation."<sup>79</sup> The text, once again focusing on the poet's relationship with nature, highlights the poet's inner turmoil and search for spiritual and philosophical stability.<sup>80</sup>

### **Air grave**

Ah! fuyez à présent,  
Malheureuses pensées!  
O! colère, o! remords!  
Souvenirs qui m'avez  
Les deux tempes pressées,  
De l'étreinte des morts.

Sentiers de mousse pleins,  
Vaporeuses fontaines,  
Grottes profondes, voix  
Des oiseaux et du vent  
Lumières incertaines  
Des sauvages sous-bois,  
Insectes animaux,  
Beauté future,  
Ne me repousse pas,  
Ô divine nature  
Je suis ton suppliant.

### **Somber song**

Ah! Away with you,  
you morose thoughts!  
Oh! Rage, Oh, remorse!  
Memories that have  
Made my head ache  
With the full force of the dead.

Paths covered with moss,  
Frothy fountains,  
Deep caves, the voices  
Of the birds and the wind.  
Gloomy twilight  
In the wild underbrush,  
Insects, animals,  
Future beauty,  
Don't reject me,  
Oh, heavenly nature,  
I worship you.

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<sup>77</sup> Henri Hell, *Francis Poulenc* (New York: Grove Press, 1959) ix.

<sup>78</sup> Poulenc, 25.

<sup>79</sup> Hell, 87.

<sup>80</sup> Butler, 8, 191.



Ah! fuyez à présent,  
Malheureuses pensées!  
O! colère, o! remords!

Ah! Away with you,  
you morose thoughts!  
Oh! Rage, Oh, remorse!<sup>81</sup>

In the fourth and final song of *Airs Chantés* Poulenc somehow manages to introduce an even faster tempo than in the first two songs, making the jubilancy of the song border just on the edge of hysteria. *Air vif* is full of unusual phrasing and sudden changes in mood. Instead of using the modulatory section to return to the tonic at the return of the A section, Poulenc withholds the moment until the second phrase of A, adding a satisfying enrichment to the ending. The final melisma in the voice successfully imitates cries carried on the wind. Poulenc, in a dry fashion, remarks the song is “typical of a spurious success.”<sup>82</sup>

#### **Air vif**

Le trésor du verger et le jardin en  
fête,  
Les fleurs des champs, des bois,  
éclatent de plaisir,  
Hélas! hélas! Et sur leur tête le vent  
enfle sa voix.

Mais toi noble océan que l'assaut  
des tourmentes  
Ne saurait ravager  
Certes plus dignement, lorsque tu  
te lamentes,  
Tu te prends à  
songer.

#### **Lively song**

What splendor, the blossoming fruit  
trees and the garden are in a festive  
mood,  
The wild flowers, the woods, rejoice.  
Beware! Beware! The wind's voice  
is already rising above their heads.

But you noble ocean, who by the  
onslaught of the gales  
will hardly be touched  
Certainly with more dignity, even if  
complaining,  
You will withdraw in  
contemplation.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Godry.

<sup>82</sup> Poulenc, 25.

<sup>83</sup> Godry.

## CHAPTER 5

### LIBBY LARSEN: *SONGS FROM LETTERS*

In a 1996 interview with Ann McCutchan, author of *The Muse that Sings*, Libby Larsen stated “I’m interested in a different perspective, a different vehicle of delivery.” Larsen was speaking of a work she was writing for The King Singers at the time, but the statement rings true for much of her other work as well. In her vocal works Larsen’s use of dramatic text abounds. Her music is infused with “American folk and popular idioms, and it is often inspired by historic and literary figures.”<sup>84</sup>

Libby Larsen, née Elizabeth Brown, was born in Delaware in 1950. She was educated at the University of Minnesota, and studied with world-renowned composers Dominick Argento, Paul Fetler and Eric Stokes. A prolific composer, Larsen’s works span a wide range of both instrumental and vocal genres including works for chamber ensemble, orchestra, choir, solo voice, and opera. *Songs from Letters* is one of Larsen’s early song cycles, written in 1989. It was commissioned by Mary Elizabeth Poore and was first performed on April 8, 1989 at Weill Recital Hall in New York.

The text of *Songs from Letters* comes from a diary supposedly written by Calamity Jane, a famous historical figure of the American Wild West. .Martha Jane Canary, self-styled “Calamity Jane,” was born in Missouri in 1857. Like many other western women she found work as a cook and laundress, working in

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<sup>84</sup> McCutchan, Ann, *The Muse that Sings: Composers Speak About the Creative Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 ) 143.

saloons and dancehalls, and as a prostitute. At times she even operated her own establishments.<sup>85</sup> There is much speculation on how Martha Canary became a legendary figure. James McLaird, author of an extensive biography of Calamity Jane asserts that the gold rush era made a ripe environment for folk legends to be born. Calamity Jane, a woman with a knack for making a reputation for herself, was seized upon by dime novelists as a character for their cheap fiction. Jane also wrote her own autobiography in which she freely embellished on the events of her life. In her later years, Jane made a living by joining some of the numerous “Wild West” shows that toured in the East and were extremely popular. Most of the photographs of Jane come from this time, and depict her in men’s clothing, often with a gun at her side, even though that was not her everyday mode of dress.<sup>86</sup>

Calamity Jane’s diary was brought to light on May 6, 1941 by Jean Hickok McCormick who claimed to be the daughter of Calamity and Wild Bill Hickok. The diary, scrawled across the pages of an old photo album, chronicles some of the important events in Calamity’s life as she relates them to her daughter, whom she refers to as “Janey.”<sup>87</sup> Heartfelt and often poetic, it romanticizes Calamity’s life, turning a rough western woman into an emotionally complex heroine of the Wild West.

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<sup>85</sup> James D. McLaird, *Calamity Jane: The Woman and the Legend* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005) 5.

<sup>86</sup> Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Pioneer Women: The Lives of Women on the Frontier* (New York: Smithmark, 1996) 113.

<sup>87</sup> McLaird, 237.

The diary, which at first seemed authentic because of the details it included which only someone close to Calamity Jane would know, was later found to be a forgery invented by McCormick for financial gain. Paine, a librarian, was one of the first people to examine the diaries for authenticity. After the initial diary was presented to him, McCormick continually uncovered new entries written on loose papers that supplemented some of the information that was lacking or seemed unauthentic in the original document. Paine, who wanted to believe in the diary's authenticity, remarks "If the diary is a forgery, it is either the cleverest or the most bungled attempt of which I know."<sup>88</sup> The timeline of the diary was not even consistent within itself, and upon further scrutiny it did not line up with what Calamity Jane wrote about herself or what was in the newspapers of the time. Even so, the obvious forgery could not keep this document from becoming part of Calamity Jane's legend.

Larsen's interpretation of Calamity Jane seems to be based solely on the Jane from McCormick's forged letters. In a note at the beginning of the score Larsen explains her interest in Calamity Jane as a "rough-tough" character, and her "struggle to explain herself honestly to her daughter Janey." Larsen makes no allusions to the letters being inauthentic, which suggests that she may be completely unaware of the fact. The Jane in *Songs from Letters* is truly, as Larsen describes, "an individual soul, a tender soul, a woman and pioneer on many frontiers."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> McLaird, 245

<sup>89</sup> Libby Larsen, *Songs from Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 1.

Larsen wastes no time in setting the mood for the cycle with the first song *So Like Your Father's* (1880). The opening recitative in the voice prepares the listener for a melodic line focused on intervallic relationships instead of traditional tonality, and rhythms that reflect normal speech patterns. The piano enters with quiet notes in both extremely high and low registers, which slowly settle into a middle range; a memory materializing from the past. The bell-like piano motive also contributes to the atmosphere with an aural effect similar to donning rose-colored glasses. The text fits easily into this environment of warm, wistful emotion.

### **So Like your Father's (1880)**

Janey, a letter came today  
and a picture of you.  
Your expression so like your father's  
brought back all the years.<sup>90</sup>

*He Never Misses* (1880) comes in directly on the heels of the first song with a galloping horse figure in the piano. The vocal writing is high-spirited as Calamity describes her unusual introduction to Wild Bill Hickok. The accompaniment recreates the gunfight with a recurring figure that sounds like gunshots and their immediate reverberation. Larsen portrays Calamity's growing excitement at "blood running down his face" with its immediate repetition a whole step higher and sharp dynamic increase, marking both the eccentricities of Calamity's character and the strength of her stomach. The final proclamation "He never aimed and he was never known to miss," is followed by a piano

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<sup>90</sup> Larsen, 1.

representation of the final shootout, after which the galloping figure returns, this time fading into the distance.

### **He Never Misses (1880)**

I met your father 'Wild Bill Hickok' near Abilene.  
A bunch of outlaws were planning to kill him.  
I crawled through the brush to warn him.

Bill killed them all.  
I'll never forget...  
Blood running down his face  
while he used two guns.  
He never aimed and he was never known to miss.<sup>91</sup>

Larsen begins *A Man Can Love Two Women* (1880) with a new motive, recalling the quiet, reflective mood of *So Like Your Father's* (1880). The motive rapidly transforms into a violently descending bass-line; the juxtaposition represents Calamity's inner struggle and is repeated throughout the song. Three repetitions of "I lost everything I loved," at increasingly higher transpositions create momentum in the vocal line that provides a contrast to the controlled intensity of "except for you." In the final lines of the song, "He loved her and he still loved me because of you, Janey," Calamity seems to try to convince her herself of the words as much as her daughter, an idea Larsen reinforces with strategic repetition, dynamic contrast and tempo changes.

### **A Man Can Love Two Women (1880)**

Don't let jealousy get you, Janey.  
It kills love and all nice things.  
It drove your father from me.  
I lost everything I loved except for you.

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<sup>91</sup> Larsen, 1.

A man can love two women at a time.  
He loved her and he still loved me.  
He loved me because of you, Janey.<sup>92</sup>

*A Working Woman (1882-1893)* begins with a direct quotation in the piano of the opening song of the cycle, followed by a surprise chord which sets up “One day I have chickens, and the next day feathers.” The jaunty, “tack-piano” tune comes in like a scene change as Calamity details the odd jobs that she has taken in the past. The piano provides a colorful milieu without completely mimicking the action of the text. The gunshot motive from *He Never Misses (1880)* returns as Calamity describes her role in the upcoming Wild West show. Syncopation in the piano for “all the virtuous women,” which occurs several times, highlights a rage bubbling just beneath the surface that is kept in check until it finally erupts at “damn their souls to hell.” The last phrase of the song comes as a quiet, matter-of-fact statement. The piano follows with a brief recall of the previous jaunty material, this time much softer as the music flows seamlessly into the next song.

### **A Working Woman (1882-1893)**

Your mother works for a living.  
One day I have chickens, and the next day feathers.

These days I’m driving a stagecoach.  
For a while, I worked in Russell’s saloon  
but when I worked there all the virtuous women  
planned to run me out of town,  
so these days, I’m driving a stagecoach.

I’ll be leaving soon to join Bill Cody’s Wild West Show.  
I’ll ride a horse bare-back,  
standing up, shoot my old Stetson hat  
twice—throwing it into the air—  
and landing on my head.

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<sup>92</sup> Larsen, 1.

These are hectic days—like hell let out for noon.  
I mind my own business, but remember  
the one thing the world hates is a woman  
who minds her own business.

All the virtuous women  
have bastards and shot-gun weddings.  
I have nursed them through childbirth and  
my only pay is a kick in the pants when my back is turned.  
These other women are pot bellied, hairy legged  
and look like something the cat dragged in.  
I wish I had the power to damn their souls to hell!

Your mother works for a living.<sup>93</sup>

This opening of *All I Have* (1902) utilizes much of the previous motivic material from the cycle; instead of recalling a single memory as in the first song, Calamity is now looking back upon her life as a whole. The text, made more poignant with Larsen's deft treatment, reveals Calamity, her health declining, left only with memories and pictures that she cannot see of the daughter that she never knew. The repetition of "all I have, pictures" as the vocal line climbs above the staff highlights a depth of emotion belied by the simple words. Calamity, in something of a death-bed confession, asks for her daughter's forgiveness. "Goodnight, little girl" reminds us that "Janey" is probably almost a woman by now, but Calamity, having never known her, will always think of her as the little girl from the picture. The bell-figure returns, this time in memoriam of a great woman of the frontier.

### **All I Have (1902)**

I am going blind.  
All hope of seeing you again is dead, Janey.  
What have I ever done except one blunder after another?  
All I have left are these pictures of you and your father.

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<sup>93</sup> Larsen, 1.



Don't pity me, Janey,  
forgive my faults and all the wrong I did you.  
Good night, little girl,  
And may God keep you from harm.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Larsen, 1.

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Research Paper Title:  
GRADUATE RECITAL PROGRAM NOTES

Major Professor: Jeanine Wagner